

THE MYSTERY SCENE

## Probing Some Thievery

**THE ZAHKOV MISSION.** By Andrei Gulyashki. Doubleday. 168 pages. \$4.50.—The hero of "The Zahkov Mission" is a counterintelligence agent for a Communist country. This is the first book to be translated into English by an author who, according to his publisher, is a best seller in Russia and the Balkans.

Avakum Zahkov reluctantly gives up his vacation on the Black Sea to investigate the theft of a top-secret plan from a geological survey post in the hill country of Bulgaria where disturbing coded wireless messages have been originating from an area with important mineral deposits near the border. The book is a winner, although the most important clue is misleading and could have been just as misleading with the reader given a fairer chance, as every mystery reader knows. Avakum Zahkov is a charming and effective hero, the story is told in a simple, straightforward way, and a cast of delightfully drawn officials and residents provide local color.

Interestingly, what would have been the inevitable big sex scene in an American spy thriller is handled like a scene in an old movie. The hero and his beautiful widowed landlady retire behind a door that shuts with a click, leaving "an empty chair, an empty stool and two half-empty glasses." The enemy foreign power isn't

named. We wonder if it was in the original.